

Aerial Insertions — Planning Considerations for the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop

by Captain Brian P. Stevens

During a recent brigade command and battle staff training (BCBST) seminar and warfighter exercise (WFX), the Brigade Reconnaissance Troop (BRT), 2d Brigade Combat Team (BCT), 49th Armor Division, Fort Worth, Texas, for the first time integrated the BRT into the BCT staff planning, coordination, and military decision-making process. The BCT had a unique perspective due to the recent influx of several soldiers assigned to the brigade staff and the BRT who have long-range surveillance (LRS) experience.

Air inserting elements of the BRT can have significant payoff for the BCT in both information collecting and fire support, but it requires detailed planning and coordination within the BCT and with the division to be successful.

As with all intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations, one key to success is getting the plan out early enough in the planning cycle to allow the collecting units to adequately plan and coordinate their piece of the operation. After the BCT staff receives either warn-

ing order 3 or the complete operations order (OPORD) from division, they must quickly assess the feasibility and risk of air inserting BRT elements. This lesson was quickly learned during the BCT mission analysis of the division OPORD. It is imperative that brigade planners quickly analyze all relevant information and develop an ISR order or reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S) order for dissemination to all units in the BCT. Ideally, the ISR or R&S order should be completed by the time the BCT staff conducts the mission analysis briefing to the brigade commander and should be transmitted with brigade warning order 2 to give all elements in the BCT adequate planning and coordination time.

In addition to using mission, enemy, terrain, troops, time available, and civilians (METT-TC) to analyze the feasibility of conducting an air insertion, several other factors may have to be analyzed to determine if the payoff of conducting the air insertion will justify the risk. Each operation will have unique factors that must

be analyzed to determine if an air insertion of BRT elements is the best course of action. In this exercise, brigade planners identified several factors as being important to determining the feasibility and likelihood of success for conducting an air insertion.

Priority Intelligence Requirements

The priority intelligence requirements (PIR) developed as a result of the mission analysis must be broken into specific information requirements (SIR) that can be collected by the BRT observation posts (OPs). During the BCBST, the brigade was conducting a deliberate attack against a well-fortified defensive position. The PIR focused on the location of the battle positions, the obstacle belt, and a tank company reserve. These PIR were suitable for SIR that could be given to the BRT OPs. As part of intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB), ISR planners also looked at the terrain at and around the named areas of interest (NAIs) to determine if it would give the dismounted BRT teams a



high probability of success during both the insertion phase and the foot-movement phase. The mountainous terrain proved to be advantageous for masking insertion routes, as well as allowing maximum standoff and line of sight for the OPs.

Communications Capability

Communications capability was one of the major concerns from the outset, due to the relatively long distances between the potential OP sites and the BCT main body. The distance from the OP sites to the line of departure (LD) was approximately 18km and the distance from the LD to the BCT assembly area was approximately 13km. To ensure good communications across the distances needed, the BRT received operational control of a BCT retransmission (RETRANS) team. A BRT squad, the RETRANS team, and one scout section conducted a forward passage of lines (FPOL) through the division cavalry squadron and moved 2km forward of the LD at H-24 hours to RETRANS traffic from the OPs.

Time Available

Another critical decision point during the mission analysis of the ISR plan was the amount of time available to plan, coordinate, and execute the air insertion to collect information. Using backward planning, the timeline was set up to insert the teams at H-24 hours to give them 12 hours to move and establish OPs, and 10 to 12 hours of observation on their NAI/target areas of interest (TAI) prior to the BCT main body crossing the LD. To insert the teams at H-24, the staff had to make the air insertion decision at H-48 to give all units and staff personnel a minimum of 24 hours to plan, coordinate, and rehearse their portion of the plan. The air mission and suppress enemy air defense (SEAD) planning and coordination must be thoroughly coordinated with the division planners and synchronized with other deep operations. We used the following timeline for air insertion planning:



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- Decision to conduct air insertion, no later than H-50.
- Warning order to BRT and attachments, H-48.
- Simultaneous planning, coordination, and rehearsals, H-48 to 24.
- Air mission briefing (aircrews and scout teams), H-25.
- Insertion, H-24.
- Ground movement, H-24 to 12.
- Observations of NAIs, no later than H-12.

Enemy Situation

The current and projected enemy situation also played a significant role in deciding if an air insertion was feasible. During the BCT WFX scenario, the enemy situation was very well defined and was conducive to conducting surveillance on both the threat main battle area, as well as avenues of approach for the combined arms reserve.

Aviation Support

Due to the fact that the BCT will not normally have organic aviation lift assets to support air insertion, one of the most important considerations is aviation support availability. Based on the limited time available for mission planning, the assistant brigade S3 conducted initial mission analysis to backward plan the teams' tentative ground and air routes, from the objective area back to the assembly area. Once tentative helicopter landing zones

(HLZ) were selected, the assistant S3 conducted face-to-face coordination with the division S3 air to determine if sufficient aviation and artillery assets were available to support the deep insertion and SEAD mission. For this process to be effective, the brigade planner and the BRT commander must have a very good working relationship and a solid understanding of each other's capabilities, limitations, and tactical task and purpose. Using a common air mission-planning checklist that the brigade recon planner and the BRT commander jointly developed facilitated this process.

Additional Planning Considerations:

Task organization. Based on recommendations and lessons learned from several other units who had employed BRTs, 2d BCT task organized the combat observation and lasing team (COLT) platoon of the direct support artillery battalion into the troop. This technique again proved to be very effective due to the added capability and improved synchronization with the direct support artillery battalion. In addition to the COLT elements, the BRT received operational control of one engineer reconnaissance team (ERT) and four ground surveillance radar (GSR) teams. Based on the PIR, the task organization built during course of action development includes two teams with a mix of scout, COLT, ERT, and GSR personnel. One team would be inserted on each side of the objective area. Once inserted, each team would deploy into three OPs that



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were focused on their PIR and NAI/TAI. This technique proved to be very effective by providing significant redundancy while still maintaining good control measures.

Command and control. Due to the fact that the division cavalry (CAV) squadron was screening along the LD and the BCT would not receive battle handover until the lead task forces conducted FPOL through the CAV, significant coordination was necessary with the CAV to ensure effective control and support of the deep deployed OPs. The TTP used was to initially collocate the BRT headquarters with the CAV tactical operations center (TOC) and give the CAV tactical control of all elements that were forward of the LD until the BCT received battle handover from the CAV. This allowed the BRT to maintain contact with the deep deployed OPs, the CAV elements in the area of operations, and the BCT headquarters element. Close coordination with the CAV ensured the best possible fire support and casualty evacuation contingency plans.

Evasion and Recovery Planning

One aspect of BCT deep operations that is often overlooked is contingency planning for recovery of deep deployed elements in the event they make contact in the air or on the ground, lose communication with higher headquarters, or ground forces are unable to conduct a rollover linkup operation. Any time teams are deployed forward of the line of departure/

contact, brigade planners must conduct the planning and coordination necessary to brief the deploying elements on the procedures employed to ensure they will be extracted by some method. In most cases, the most likely method of extraction for deployed BRT elements will be a rollover or linkup operations, but the ground tactical plan does not always progress as expected and planners should have alternate methods for extracting deployed teams.

In this scenario, brigade planners used the joint combat search and rescue (JCSAR) information in the daily air tasking order (ATO) to brief deploying teams on signaling and authentication procedures for the teams in the event that they had to conduct a ground evasion and recovery operation. Brigade planners also coordinated with the BRT command element for contact times, evasion corridors, and final evasion points for all deploying teams to ensure that all elements would eventually be recovered even if the ground tactical plan of the BCT main body failed to support a linkup with deployed teams. Using a jointly developed JCSAR planning checklist to ensure that all necessary information was rapidly disseminated to the BRT commander when coordination was complete also enhanced this process.

By employing an aggressive and deep ISR plan, the BCT attained a significant tactical advantage that contributed to its success during offensive operations. The

detailed planning and coordination that took place during the brigade military decisionmaking process ensured that the deep insertion was successful and effective. During the scenario, five out of six teams were effectively reporting and targeting throughout the battle. Early deployment and reporting allowed the S2 to pinpoint 90 percent of the threat's platoon-sized battle positions and 80 percent of the obstacle locations well before the lead task forces crossed the LD. This rapid, detailed, and accurate picture of the threat on the battlefield ensured that the commander had the information he needed to make timely decisions to accomplish the mission. The early and effective reporting also assisted all elements in the brigade in maintaining a common operational picture throughout the battle.



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